

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fake Lottery Prize Letters Abound in Seniors Strike Back Project

(Phoenix, Ariz. – March 26, 2008) Prize “checks” from foreign lotteries, investment opportunities that promise triple-digit returns, “Can’t Miss” work-at-home business opportunities and “Final Warnings” for vehicle warranties.

These were some of the many fraudulent or suspicious offers that showed up in thousands of pieces of mail collected by hundreds of volunteers from around Arizona as part of Seniors Strike Back, an anti-fraud project sponsored by the Attorney General’s Office. Over 10,000 pieces of mail were collected last year by seniors and sorted into categories at events around the state. The Attorney General’s Office has taken numerous actions based on the mail collected.

“Last April, our senior volunteers saved more than 10,000 pieces of junk mail,” Attorney General Terry Goddard said at Friendship Village in Tempe. “My Office identified hundreds of pieces that we are following up with letters, notices, further investigation and, in a few cases, possible lawsuits. We are also using examples collected to make Arizona seniors more aware of scams that may appear in their mailboxes.”

The leading category of fraudulent letters sent to seniors was lottery and sweepstakes prize notifications. More than 500 such letters were found in the mail collected. These letters typically tell the recipient he or she has won a valuable prize through a lottery and often require the payment of a fee to claim that prize. Some letters even contained “checks” for partial payment of the winnings, asking the recipient to deposit the check and return part of it to pay for fees and expenses. One such check for \$5,500 was recently mailed to Gov. Janet Napolitano.

The Office forwarded many of the “Foreign Lottery” letters to the U.S. Postal Inspectors or to the Attorney General’s Office in the state where they originated. Several victims of these lottery scams contacted the Arizona Attorney General to file complaints.

Other examples of questionable solicitations were forwarded to Arizona regulatory agencies, such as the Department of Insurance and Department of Financial Institutions.

“The work done by our volunteers and senior advocacy groups on this project was invaluable,” Goddard said. “Educating Arizonans, particularly seniors, who are often the target of mail scams, about the potential fraud that may await them in their mailboxes is essential to preventing economic harm to consumers.”

Hundreds of charitable solicitations were collected during Senior Strike Back, including many sent by organizations that did not appear to be registered with the Arizona Secretary of State as required by Arizona law. The Attorney General's Office sent letters to those organizations reminding them of the requirements to register all charitable organizations the Secretary of State's Office before beginning solicitation in Arizona.

March is Arizona Consumer Protection Month, and throughout the month Goddard is encouraging people to master the financial facts of life. Savvy consumers are likely to make smarter decisions about managing their money, using credit wisely and building a solid financial foundation.

Consumers can also find practical tips and information online at www.azag.gov.

If you believe you have been a victim of fraud, please contact the Attorney General's Office in Phoenix at 602.542.5763; in Tucson at 520.628.6504; or outside the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas at 1.800.352.8431. To file a complaint in person, the Attorney General's Office has 36 satellite offices throughout Arizona with volunteers available to help. Locations and hours are posted on the Attorney General's Web site at www.azag.gov.

Please visit the Web site to sign up for scam alerts and weekly messages from Attorney General Goddard. If your church or community group would like a presentation on consumer scams, identity theft or other related topics, contact the Attorney General's Community Services Program at 602.542.2123 or communityservices@azag.gov.

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